

§ 1.411(a)-5

(iii) and section 4049 of ERISA with respect to the plan. Furthermore, nonforfeitable rights are not considered to be forfeitable by reason of the fact that they may be reduced as allowed under sections 401(a)(5) and 401(1). To the extent that rights are not required to be nonforfeitable to satisfy the minimum vesting standards, or the non-discrimination requirements of section 401(a)(4), they may be forfeited without regard to the limitations on forfeitability required by this section. The right of an employee to repurchase his accrued benefit for example under section 411(a)(3)(D), is an example of a right which is required to satisfy such standards. Accordingly, such a right is subject to the limitations on forfeitability. Rights which are required to be prospectively nonforfeitable under the vesting standards are nonforfeitable and may not be forfeited until it is determined that such rights are, in fact, in excess of the vesting standards. Thus, employees have a right to vest in the accrued benefits if they continue in employment of employers maintaining the plan unless a forfeitable event recognized by section 411 occurs. For example, if a plan covered employees in Division A of Corporation X under a plan utilizing a 5-year 100 percent vesting schedule, the plan could not forfeit employees' rights on account of their moving to service in Division B of Corporation X prior to completion of 5 years of service even though employees are not vested at that time.

(b) [Reserved]

(c) *Examples.* The rules of this section are illustrated by the following examples:

Example (1). Corporation A's plan provides that an employee is fully vested in his employer-derived accrued benefit after completion of 3 years of service. The plan also provides that if the employee works for a competitor he forfeits his rights in the plan. Such provision could result in the forfeiture of an employee's rights which are required to be nonforfeitable under section 411 and therefore the plan would not satisfy the requirements of section 411. If the plan limited the forfeiture to employees who completed less than 5 years of service, the plan would not fail to satisfy the requirements of section 411 because the forfeitures under this provision are limited to rights which are in

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excess of the minimum required to be nonforfeitable under section 411(a)(2)(A).

[T.D. 8170, 53 FR 241, Jan. 6, 1988]

§ 1.411(a)-5 Service included in determination of nonforfeitable percentage.

(a) *In general.* Under section 411(a)(4), for purposes of determining the nonforfeitable percentage of an employee's right to his employer-derived accrued benefit under section 411(a)(2) and § 1.411(a)-3, all of an employee's years of service with an employer or employers maintaining the plan shall be taken into account except that years of service described in paragraph (b) of this section may be disregarded.

(b) *Certain service.* For purposes of paragraph (a) of this section, the following years of service may be disregarded:

(1) *Service before age 22.* (i) In the case of a plan which satisfies the requirements of section 411(a)(2) (A) or (B) (relating to 10-year vesting and 5-15-year vesting, respectively), a year of service completed by an employee before he attains age 22.

(ii) In the case of a plan which does not satisfy the requirements of section 411(a)(2) (A) or (B), a year of service completed by an employee before he attains age 22 if the employee is not a participant (for purposes of section 410) in the plan at any time during such year.

(iii) For purposes of this subparagraph in the case of a plan utilizing computation periods, service during a computation period described in section 411(a)(5)(A) within which the employee attains age 22 may not be disregarded. In the case of a plan utilizing the elapsed time method described in § 1.410(a)-7, service on or after the date on which the employee attains age 22 may not be disregarded.

(2) *Contributory plans.* In the case of a plan utilizing computation periods, a year of service completed by an employee under a plan which requires mandatory contributions (within the meaning of section 411(c)(2)(C) and § 1.411(c)-1(c)(4)) to be made by the employee for such year, if the employee does not participate for such year solely because of his failure to make all mandatory contributions to the plan

for such year. If the employee contributes any part of the mandatory contributions for the year, such year may not be excluded by reason of this subparagraph. In the case of a plan utilizing the elapsed time method described in § 1.410(a)-7, the service which may be disregarded is the period with respect to which the mandatory contribution is not made.

(3) *Plan not maintained*—(i) *In general.* An employee's years of service with an employer during any period for which the employer did not maintain the plan or a predecessor plan may be disregarded for purposes of section 411(a)(2). Paragraph (b)(3)(ii) of this section provides rules regarding the period prior to the adoption of a plan. Paragraph (b)(3)(iii) of this section provides rules regarding the period after the termination of a plan. Paragraph (b)(3)(iv) of this section provides rules regarding employers who have certain relationships with other employers maintaining the plan.

(ii) *Period prior to adoption.* The period for which a plan is not maintained by an employer includes the period before the plan was established. For purposes of this subdivision, a plan is established on the first day of the plan year in which the plan is adopted even though the plan is adopted after such first day. Except as provided in paragraph (b)(3)(iv) of this section if an employer adopts a plan which has previously been established by another employer or group of employers, the plan is not maintained by the adopting employer prior to the first day of the plan year in which the plan is adopted by the adopting employer. In the case of a transfer of assets or liabilities (including a merger or consolidation) involving two plans maintained by a single employer, the successor (or transferee) plan is treated as if it was established at the same time as the date of the establishment of the earliest component plan. In the case of a plan merger, consolidation, or transfer of plan assets or liabilities involving plans of two or more employers, the successor plan is treated as if it were established on each of the separate dates on which such component plan was established for the employees of each employer. Thus, for example, if employer A estab-

lishes a plan January 1, 1970, and employer B establishes a plan January 1, 1980, and the plans were subsequently merged, then the merged plan would be treated as if it were in existence on January 1, 1970, with respect to A's employees and as if it were in existence on January 1, 1980, with respect to B's employees.

(iii) *Period after termination or withdrawal.* The period for which a plan is not maintained by an employer includes the period after the plan is terminated. For purposes of this section, a plan is terminated at the date there is a termination of the plan within the meaning of section 411(d)(3)(A) and the regulations thereunder. Notwithstanding the preceding sentence, if contributions to or under a plan are made after termination, the plan is treated as being maintained until such contributions cease, whether or not accruals are made after such termination. If, after termination of a plan in circumstances under which the employer may be liable to the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation under section 4062 of the Act, employer contributions are made to or under the plan to fund benefits accrued at the time of termination, such contributions shall, for purposes of this paragraph, be deemed to be payments in satisfaction of employer liability to such Corporation rather than contributions to or under the plan. In the case of a plan maintained by more than one employer, the period for which the plan is not maintained by the withdrawing employer includes the period after the withdrawal from the plan.

(iv) *Certain employers.* For purposes of this subparagraph—

(A) *Predecessor employers.* Service with a predecessor employer who maintained the plan of the current employer is treated as service with such current employer (see section 414(a)(1) and the regulations thereunder), and certain service with a predecessor employer who did not maintain the plan of the current employer is treated as service with the current employer (see section 414(a)(2) and the regulations thereunder).

(B) *Related employers.* Service with an employer is treated as service for certain related employers for the period

during which the employers are related. These related employers include members of a controlled group of corporations (within the meaning of section 1563(a), determined without regard to subsections (a)(4) and (e)(3) (C) thereof) and trades or businesses (whether or not incorporated) which are under common control (see section 414 (b) and (c) and 29 CFR Part 2530, Department of Labor regulations relating to minimum standards for employee pension benefit plans).

(C) *Plan maintained by more than one employer.* Service with an employer who maintains a plan is treated as service for each other employer who maintains that plan for the period during which the employers are maintaining the plan (see section 413 (b)(4) and (c)(3) and 29 CFR Part 2530, Department of Labor regulations relating to minimum standards for employee pension benefit plans).

(v) *Predecessor plan*—(A) *General rule.* In the case of an employee who was covered by a predecessor plan, the time the successor of such plan is maintained for such employee includes the time the predecessor plan was maintained if, as of the later of the time the predecessor plan is terminated or the successor plan is established, the employee's years of service under the predecessor plan are not equalled or exceeded by the aggregate number of consecutive 1-year breaks in service occurring after such years of service. Years of service and breaks in service, without regard to whether the employee has nonforfeitable rights under the predecessor plan, are determined under section 411(a) (5) and (6) except that years between the termination date of the predecessor plan and the date of establishment of the successor plan do not count as years of service.

(B) *Definition of predecessor plan.* For purposes of this section, if—

(1) An employer establishes a retirement plan (within the meaning of section 7476(d)) qualified under subchapter D of chapter 1 of the Code within the 5-year period immediately preceding or following the date another such plan terminates, and

(2) The other plan is terminated during a plan year to which this section applies.

The terminated plan is a predecessor plan with respect to such other plan.

(C) *Example.* The rules provided by this subparagraph are illustrated by the following example:

Example. (1) Employer X's qualified plan A terminated on January 1, 1977. Employer X established qualified plan B on January 1, 1981. Under paragraph (b)(3)(v)(B) of this section, plan A is a predecessor plan with respect to plan B because plan B is established within the 5-year period immediately following the date plan A terminated.

(2) Employee C was not covered by the A plan. Under the general rule in subdivision (v)(A) of this subparagraph, plan B is not maintained until January 1, 1981, with respect to Employee C.

(3) Employee D was covered by the A plan. On December 31, 1976, D had 4 years of service. D had 4 consecutive 1-year breaks in service because, during the years between the termination of plan A and the establishment of plan B, he did not have more than 500 hours of service in any applicable computation period. Because D's consecutive 1-year breaks (4) equal his years of service prior to his breaks (4), plan B is not maintained until January 1, 1981, with respect to employee D.

(4) Employee E was covered by the A plan. On December 31, 1975, E had 6 years of service. E had a 1-year break in service in 1976. E also had 4 consecutive 1-year breaks in service for the period between plan A's termination and plan B's establishment. Because E's years of service (6) are not less than his consecutive 1-year breaks (5), plan B is maintained for E as of the establishment date of plan A.

(4) *Break in service.* A year of service which is not required to be taken into account by reason of a break in service (within the meaning of section 411(a)(6) and § 1.411(a)-6)).

(5) *Service before January 1, 1971.* A year of service completed by an employee prior to January 1, 1971, unless the employee completes at least 3 years of service at any time after December 31, 1970. For purposes of determining if an employee completes 3 years of service, whether or not consecutive, the exceptions of section 411(a)(4) are not applicable. For the meaning of the term "year of service", see regulations prescribed by the Secretary of Labor under 29 CFR Part 2530, relating to minimum standards for employee pension benefit plans.

(6) *Service before effective date.* A year of service completed before the first

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plan year for which this section applies to the plan, if such service would have been disregarded under the plan rules relating to breaks in service (whether or not such rules are so designated in the plan) as such rules were in effect from time to time under the plan. For this purpose, plan rules which result in the loss of prior vesting or benefit accruals of an employee, or which deny an employee eligibility to participate, by reason of separation or failure to complete a required period of service within a specified period of time (*e.g.*, 300 hours in one year) will be considered break in service rules. See § 1.411(a)-9 for requirements relating to certain amendments to the break in service rules of a plan.

(i) [Reserved]

(ii) *Examples.* The rules of this subparagraph are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. The A plan in 1971 provides for immediate participation and vesting at normal retirement age. Employees accrue a unit benefit based on their compensation in each year. The plan provides that if an employee is not employed on the last day of the calendar year, he loses all accrued benefits. The requirement of employment on the last day of the year is a break in service rule because employees can lose benefits by reason of their separation. Accordingly, in the case of employees who separate and do not return by the close of the year, service which is completed prior to separation may be disregarded.

Example 2. The B plan in 1971 excludes from plan participation employees who work less than 1,200 hours per year. Because years of less than 1,200 hours are not taken into account under the B plan for eligibility to participate, such years are excluded under rules relating to breaks in service. Therefore, the years can be disregarded under this subparagraph.

Example 3. The C plan in 1971 provides for immediate participation and provides accruals and vesting credit for 1,200 hours or more in a given year. The plan provides that if a participant works less than 300 hours in a given year, he loses all prior vesting and benefit credits. The 300 hour rule is a break in service rule because the failure to complete 300 hours results in the loss of vesting and prior service credit. The 1,200 hour requirement is not a break in service rule because even though employees do not increase vesting or accrue benefits for service between 300 and 1,200 hours, they cannot lose prior vesting or benefits for such service. Accordingly, the C plan can disregard completed years

only on account of less than 300 hours of service by an employee.

(c) *Special continuity rule for certain plans.* For special rules for computing years of service in the case of a plan maintained by more than one employer, see 29 CFR Part 2530 (Department of Labor regulations relating to minimum standards for employee pension benefit plans).

(Sec. 411 (88 Stat. 901, 26 U.S.C. 411))

[T.D. 7501, 42 FR 42327, Aug. 23, 1977, as amended by T.D. 7703, 45 FR 40985, June 17, 1980]

§ 1.411(a)-6 Year of service; hours of service; breaks in service.

(a) *Year of service.* Under section 411 (a)(5)(A), for purposes of the regulations thereunder, the term “year of service” is defined in regulations prescribed by the Secretary of Labor under section 203(b)(2)(A) of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974. For special rules applicable to seasonal industries and maritime industries, see regulations prescribed by the Secretary of Labor under subparagraphs (C) and (D) of section 203(b)(2) of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974.

(b) *Hours of service.* Under section 411(a)(5)(B), for purposes of the regulations thereunder, the term “hours of service” has the meaning provided by section 410(a)(3)(C). See regulations prescribed by the Secretary of Labor under 29 CFR Part 2530, relating to minimum standards for employee pension benefit plans.

(c) *Breaks in service.* Under section 411(a)(6), for purposes of § 1.411(a)-5(b)(4) and of this paragraph—

(1) *In general*—(i) *Year of service after 1-year break in service.* In the case of any employee who has incurred a 1-year break in service, years of service completed before such break are not required to be taken into account until the employee has completed one year of service after his return to service.

(ii) *Defined contribution plan.* In the case of a participant in a defined contribution plan or in an insured defined benefit plan (which plan satisfies the requirements of section 411 (b)(1)(F) and § 1.411(b)-1) who has incurred a 1-year break in service, years of service

completed after such break are not required to be taken into account for purposes of determining the nonforfeitable percentage of the participant's right to employer-derived benefits which accrued before such break. This subdivision does not permit years of service completed before a 1-year break in service to be disregarded in determining the nonforfeitable percentage of a participant's right to employer-derived benefits which accrue after such break.

(iii) *Nonvested participants.* In the case of an employee who is a nonvested participant in employer-derived benefits at the time he incurs a 1-year break in service, years of service completed by such participant before such break are not required to be taken into account for purposes of determining the nonforfeitable percentage of his right to employer-derived benefits if at such time the number of consecutive 1-year breaks in service included in his most recent break in service equals or exceeds the aggregate number of his years of service, whether or not consecutive, completed before such break. In the case of a plan utilizing the elapsed time method described in § 1.410(a)-7, the condition in the preceding sentence shall be satisfied if the period of severance is at least one year and the consecutive period of severance equals or exceeds his prior period of service, whether or not consecutive, completed before such period of severance. In computing the aggregate number of years of service prior to such break, years of service which could have been disregarded under this subdivision by reason of any prior break in service may be disregarded.

(2) *One-year break in service defined.* The term "1-year break in service" means a calendar year, plan year, or other 12-consecutive month period designated by a plan (and not prohibited under regulations prescribed by the Secretary of Labor) during which the participant has not completed more than 500 hours of service. In the case of a plan utilizing the elapsed time method, the term "1-year break in service" means a 12-consecutive month period beginning on the severance from service date or any anniversary thereof and ending on the next succeeding anniversary

of such date; provided, however, that the employee during such 12-consecutive-month period does not complete any hours of service within the meaning of 29 CFR Part 2530.200b-2(a) for the employer or employers maintaining the plan. See regulations prescribed by the Secretary of Labor under 29 CFR Part 2530, relating to minimum standards for employee pension benefit plans.

(d) *Examples.* The rules provided by this section are illustrated by the following examples:

Example (1). (i) X Corporation maintains a defined contribution plan to which section 411 applies. The plan uses the calendar year as the vesting computation period. In 1980, Employee A, who was hired at age 35, separates from the service of X Corporation after completing 4 years of service. At the time of his separation, Employee A had a nonforfeitable right to 25 percent of his employer-derived accrued benefit which was not distributed. In 1985, after incurring 5 consecutive one-year breaks in service, Employee A is re-employed by X Corporation and becomes an active participant in the plan. The plan provides that, for 1985 and all subsequent years, Employee A's previous years of service will not be taken into account for purposes of computing the nonforfeitable percentage of his employer-derived accrued benefit, solely because of his break in service.

(ii) The plan fails to satisfy section 411. Section 411(a)(6)(B) would permit the plan to disregard Employee A's prior service for purposes of computing his nonforfeitable percentage in 1985 only, but such service must be taken into account in subsequent years unless there is another break in service. Under section 411(a)(6)(C), the plan is not required to take Employee A's post-break service into account for purposes of computing his nonforfeitable right to his prebreak employer-derived accrued benefits. This provision, however, would not permit the plan to disregard pre-break service in determining his nonforfeitable right to his benefit accrued after the break. The exception provided by section 411(a)(6)(D) does not apply in the case of a participant who has any nonforfeitable right to his accrued benefit derived from employer contributions.

Example (2). (i) X Corporation maintains a qualified plan to which sections 410 and 411 (relating to minimum participation standards and minimum vesting standards, respectively) apply. The plan permits participation upon completion of a year of service and provides that 100% of an employee's employer-derived accrued benefit vests after 10 years of service. The plan uses the calendar year as the vesting computation period. The plan

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provides that an employee who completes at least 1,000 hours of service in a 12-month period is credited with a year of service for participation and vesting purposes. The plan also provides that an employee who does not complete more than 500 hours of service in that 12-month period incurs a one-year break in service. The plan includes the rule described in section 411 (a)(6)(D) for participation and vesting purposes. Under this rule, an employee's years of service prior to a break in service may be disregarded under certain circumstances if he has no vested right to any employer-derived benefit under the plan. The plan does not contain the rule described in section 411(a)(6)(B) (relating to the requirement of one year of service after a one-year break in service).

(ii) Employee A commences employment with the X Corporation on January 1, 1977. Employee A's employment history for 1977 through 1989 is as follows:

| Year ending December 31 | Hours of service completed |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1977 | 1,000 |
| 1978 | 800 |
| 1979 | 1,000 |
| 1980 | 400 |
| 1981 | 1,000 |
| 1982 | 0 |
| 1983 | 400 |
| 1984 | 1,000 |
| 1985 | 0 |
| 1986 | 0 |
| 1987 | 500 |
| 1988 | 200 |
| 1989 | 1,000 |

Employee A's status as a participant during this period is determined as follows:

1978: Employee A was a plan participant on January 1, 1978, because he completed a year of service (1,000 hours) in 1977. He did not complete a year of service in 1978 because he completed fewer than 1,000 hours in that year. Because he completed more than 500 hours of service in 1978, however, Employee A did not incur a one-year break in service that year.

1979: Employee A completes a year of service in 1979. Because he did not incur a one-year break in service in 1978, the plan may not disregard his 1977 service for purposes of determining his years of service as of January 1, 1979.

1980: Employee A incurs a one-year break in service in 1980.

1981: Because Employee A had completed 2 years of service prior to 1981 and had incurred one 1-year break in service prior to 1981, under section 411(a)(6)(D), the plan may not disregard his pre-1980 service in 1981. Employee A completes a year of service in 1981.

1982: Employee A incurs a one-year break in service in 1982.

1983: Employee A incurs a one-year break in service in 1983. As of the end of 1983, he has completed 3 years of service and has incurred 2 consecutive one-year breaks in service.

1984: Employee A completes a year of service in 1984. Under section 411(a)(6)(D), his pre-1982 service may not be disregarded in 1984 because, as of the beginning of 1984, his pre-1984 years of service (3) exceed his consecutive one-year breaks in service (2).

1984-1988: Employee A incurs 4 consecutive one-year breaks in service during the years 1985 through 1988.

1989: Employee A's pre-1989 service is disregarded in 1989 and all subsequent plan years because his years of service as of January 1, 1989, equal the number of consecutive one-year breaks he has incurred as of that date. Therefore, as of the beginning of 1989, Employee A is not a plan participant. Employee A completes a year of service in 1989. (Although section 411(a)(6)(D) does not prohibit the plan provision under which Employee A's pre-1989 service is disregarded, that section does not require such a provision in a qualified plan.)

(Sec. 411 (88 Stat. 901; 26 U.S.C. 411))

[T.D. 7501, 42 FR 42329, Aug. 23, 1977, as amended by T.D. 7703, 45 FR 40985, June 17, 1980]

§ 1.411(a)-7 Definitions and special rules.

(a) *Accrued benefit.* For purposes of section 411 and the regulations thereunder, the term "accrued benefit" means—

(1) *Defined benefit plan.* In the case of a defined benefit plan—

(i) If the plan provides an accrued benefit in the form of an annual benefit commencing at normal retirement age, such accrued benefit, or

(ii) If the plan does not provide an accrued benefit in the form described in subdivision (i) of this subparagraph, an annual benefit commencing at normal retirement age which is the actuarial equivalent (determined under section 411(c)(3) and § 1.411(c)-5) of the accrued benefit determined under the plan. In general, the term "accrued benefits" refers only to pension or retirement benefits. Consequently, accrued benefits do not include ancillary benefits not directly related to retirement benefits such as payment of medical expenses (or insurance premiums for such expenses), disability benefits not in excess of the qualified disability